

Barking for Attention-Getting

Attention-getting barking in dogs can be corrected, provided that the owner is determined to train consistently.

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Reason for Barking: Attention-Getting

When an owner deliberately spoils a dog or unintentionally rewards him for barking, the dog quickly learns how to get attention. For example, a dog barks because he is startled, and the owner reaches down and pets the dog to assure him that all is well. The dog perceives the petting and consoling as a reward for barking. Thus he barks whenever he wants attention.

Attention-getting barking can be corrected, provided that the owner is determined to unspoil the dog. Let's create a fictitious scenario and the solution to the problem it produces. This problem is common to small dogs and their owners.

As a puppy, the dog frequently barked and jumped up on the owner to get the owners attention. The owner would bend down and pick up the puppy. Soon the puppy learned that whenever he wanted the owners attention, all he had to do was bark and jump up on his owner.

Well, by the time the puppy reaches adulthood, the habit has been formed and the dog constantly demands that his owner pick him up and carry him around. The owner finds this annoying, yet he loves the little dog, so he hesitates to reprimand him. Instead the owner tries yelling at the dog, but to no avail. The dog continues to jump and the owner continues to try various tactics to correct the problem, yet nothing positive comes of the owners attempts.

The solution to this problem is to let the dog know that it's fine to ask for attention, but in an acceptable manner. The dog must learn that, as with most things in life, there is a price to pay for that attention. Instead of immediately responding to the dogs request that he be picked up, the owner now has the dog do something to earn his attention. Once the dog begins to realize that attention is no longer free, he can be trained to remain on the floor and accept attention from there rather than from the owners arms.

If you experience a similar problem, teach the dog to sit on command. Then, when he comes to you and demands your attention, have him sit before you respond to him. When he obeys the sit command, you can give him some attention. At first, you can pick him up, pet and praise him briefly and then return him to the floor. If he barks and jumps on you again, have him sit again. Follow his sit with praise again, but this time don't pick him up. Instead, bend down and pet him as he sits in front of you.

Soon the dog will learn that he must do something before he will receive your attention. In other words, ignoring behavior you don't want and recognizing behavior you do want will produce positive results. Responding to behavior you don't want is perceived by the dog as acceptance, and he'll continue to do it forever. However, when he learns that you'll only recognize him for good behavior, he'll exercise that good behavior in order to receive your attention.

Next step: Barking as an Attempt to Communicate

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